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For some it may seem only fitting the Montgomery County Council isenging in their first session of the new year with more Clarksburg issues. As the council tries to put the pieces back together in their failed planning and implementation process, councilmembers sought help from previous Planning Board Chairman Royce Hanson, who warned ahead of time that "Some of my observations are blunt. But you asked for an opinion with the bark off, so you are entitled to what you paid for."

During Tuesday's council meeting Hanson labeled the Clarksburg crisis as "a symptom of serious systemic problems," calling for a reformation in the development review process. He identified a "lack of in-

stitutional and intellectual leadership" as one of the major flaws in the planning process and claimed that a strong professional planner hasn't served as planning director in more than 10 years. Hanson suggested that the county pursue a national recruitment plan to find the leadership, accountability and discipline he says is missing.

"You need to clarify your expectations of board members. You need to use your semi annual meeting with the planning board to deal with important stuff rather than the complaint of the week. You should provide the support necessary for a revision of the zoning ordinance, it's a mess," said Hanson. "You need to act on planning issues in context, so that you can deal with them comprehensively, rather than instance by instance."

Hanson served as planning board chairman during the 1970s and ap-

proached the council after members asked for his input on the eminent planning and implementation flaws. He addressed the council as well as county Planning Board Chairman Derick Berlage. Councilmembers listened intently to Hanson and praised his advice. Nancy Floryen (D) At Large said Hanson is "probably only person who can sit us down and tell us what we need to here."

CTCAC legal fees

In other Clarksburg news, the Clarksburg Town Center Advisory Committee issued a letter to the County Council last week requesting reimbursement fees for their legal costs incurred from their mediation efforts. CTCAC is the citizens group based out of Clarksburg that is largely

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responsible for illuminating the inefficiencies in the county's planning, zoning and implementation process in addition to the violations made by the developer and builders in the construction of the Clarksburg Town Center. Last month then Council President Perez (D-District 5) recommended that the county pay for a portion of their bill out of the FY06 Council Office Budget.

CTCAC is composed of seven members. The organization claims

to have worked more than 7,000 hours on the investigation, spending \$267,441 on legal fees and \$35,691 in out-of-pocket expenses. CTCAC estimates that additional mediation costs of up to \$200,000 may be required. "We're not asking for reimbursement of our time," said Presley. "What we're asking is at the end of this process, that we don't wind up in debt for the privilege of helping the county to correct these ills that would not have otherwise come to light."

The developer and builders of the Clarksburg Town Center each

agreed to pay one-third of CTCAC's mediation fees, leaving one-third of their costs up to the council to decide if they will pay.

Councilmembers were torn on the request and could not decide to issue or deny funds for their legal payments. Instead, the council chose to make a decision at a later point in the mediation process. "There is a fairly sharp disagreement among councilmembers," said Leventhal. "It seems to me that there is a potential majority for paying these expenses, but not today."

Regarding CTCAC's legal fees, some councilmembers including Perez, Steve Silverman (D-District 4) and Howard Dennis (R-District 1) say the county should be held accountable for CTCAC's services and "pay up." Councilmembers against the request, including Vice President Marilyn Praisner (D-District 4) and Nancy Floreen argued that a local citizens group should not have their legal fees paid for out of the tax payers' wallet. "And if so, where do they draw the line for other citizens that requested fees for their work on Clarksburg?"

Presley claims that existing tax dollars used to fund a flawed government entity is a larger waste of tax payers' money. "What I resent is, as a citizen, being put in a position where we would have to make those kinds of decisions where you have to say to yourself, do we quit this effort and let the planning board not acknowledge the extent of the errors and these violations, [or] do you let that go because there is no one to cover the attorney fee? We made the decision not to do that because we saw there was a bigger benefit to be gained."